

---

## Tips for Writing MCQs

---

### Standard Format for Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQs) That Include a Clinical Scenario/Vignette

A [patient description] presents with [symptoms]. History reveals [historical findings]. Physical examination shows [exam findings]. Diagnostic studies show [imaging, electrophysiologic, or laboratory results]. The most appropriate [next step, diagnosis, management, etc] is

(A)  
(B)  
(C)  
(D)

### Without a Vignette, Lead-ins May Look Like This:

- Which of the following is a sign of cutaneous T-cell lymphoma?
- The most common cause of abdominal aortic aneurysms is

### What to Ask Yourself When Developing MCQs

- Is this question testing something important?
- Do the questions address all of the activity's learning objectives?
- Is the clinical scenario free of superfluous information?
- Is the clinical scenario necessary to answer the question?
- Is there clearly one best answer?
- Are all of the options plausible?
- Are the options in alphabetical (or numerical) order? (helps avoid subconscious patterns in correct answer placement)
- Do all possible answers flow from the lead-in with proper grammar?
- Are all of the options focused? (eg, options are not a mix of management steps and diagnostic tests)

### What to Avoid

- Teaching
- True/False questions
- Negatively phrased questions (eg, "...all of the following **except**," "Diagnostic testing should **not** include," the **least** likely diagnosis is")
- Correct answer is the longest and most detailed
- Answer choices that are opposites (eg, hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism)
- Answer choices that are too closely related (eg, MRI with contrast and MRI without contrast)

### Recommended Item Writing Guides

- National Board of Medical Examiners: <http://www.nbme.org/publications/item-writing-manual.html>
- National Board of Osteopathic Medical Examiners: <http://www.aobpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/IW-guide-2006.pdf>